

Message Text

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HA-05 TRSE-00 SSM-03 /073 W
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R 171900Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9271
INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION SINAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 13106

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM EG
SUBJECT: RENEWED MUSLIM/OPTIC TENSION

SUMMARY: COPTIC/MUSLIM TENSIONS AGAIN ON RISE AS RESULT
SERIES OF RECENT INCIDENTS. COPTIC LEADERS HAVE DISCUSSED
MATTER WITH PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER, MINISTER OF
INTERIOR AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE. GOVERNMENT HAS EX-
HIBITED UNDERSTANDING; SADAT GIVEN HIGH MARKS FOR PRO-
MOTING INTERCOMMUNAL ACCORD. CAMPUS BASED ISLAMIC
SOCIETIES BLAMED; GOAL SAID TO BE GOVERNMENT'S OVERTHROW.
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES (COPTIC, CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT),
WITH GOVERNMENT BLESSING, ARE DRAFTING UNIFIED CHRISTIAN
PERSONAL STATUS LAW. ON POLITICS, LEADING COPTIC
BISHOP EXPRESSED OPPOSITION TO SADAT REFERENDUM, FEARING
IT WILL LEAD TO EROSION OF FREEDOM. SAID SADAT'S CRITICS
ENCOURAGED BY LACK OF PROGRESS IN PEACE PROCESS AND
APPEALED TO USG TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO OBTAIN
SOME MOVEMENT. OTHERWISE, SADAT COULD GO AND "ANYTHING
WHICH FOLLOWS HIM WOULD BE HORRIBLE FOR US." END
SUMMARY.

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1. BISHOP SAMUEL INFORMED EMBOFF MAY 16 OF SERIES
RECENT INCIDENTS WHICH HAVE RAISED, AGAIN, TENSION
BETWEEN COPTIC AND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES. FIRST TOOK PLACE
IN UPPER EGYPTIAN CITY OF MINYA, WHERE GROUP
OF MUSLIM UNIVERSITY STUDENTS STONED CHURCH AT DAWN ON
EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 30. POLICE ARRESTED TEN STUDENTS.

IN RETALIATION, MUSLIM STUDENTS AT NEARBY ASSIUT UNIVERSITY WEEK LATER ATTACKED CHRISTIAN COLLEAGUES IN CAMPUS DORMATORIES, INJURING SEVERAL AND DAMAGING PROPERTY (PARTICULARLY RELIGIOUS OBJECTS). ASSIUT PRESIDENT REPORTEDLY ATTEMPTED INTERVENE TO PROTECT CHRISTIAN STUDENTS BUT WAS, HIMSELF, THREATENED BY ATTACKERS. SAMUEL SAID BOTH MINYA AND ASSIUT ASSAULTS WERE ORGANIZED BY CAMPUS BASED RIGHT WING ISLAMIC SOCIETIES (GAMAA ISLAMIYA).

2. THIRD INCIDENT, SAID SAMUEL, TOOK PLACE LAST WEEK IN VILLAGE NEAR SADAT'S MIT ABU AL KOM, WHERE VILLAGERS STONED CHURCH. POLICE, ACCORDING SAMUEL, DID NOT INTERVENE. HE SUSPECTED SADAT'S HIGHLY PUBLICIZED MAY 12 VISIT TO VILLAGE, AND TO COPTIC SCHOOL WHERE PRESIDENT RECEIVED HIS PRIMARY EDUCATION, WERE DIRECT RESULT OF INCIDENT. SAMUEL GAVE SADAT (AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR) HIGH MARKS FOR ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE INTERCOMMUNAL RELATIONS.

3. SAMUEL NOTED HE HAS DISCUSSED INCIDENTS WITH MININT NABAWI AND PM SALEM. BOTH HAVE BEEN UNDERSTANDING AND HAVE PROMISED CURB EXTREMISTS. BOTH RECOGNIZE, SAID SAMUEL, THAT COPTS ARE "SCAPEGOATS" FOR MUSLIM EXTREMISTS WHOSE REAL OBJECTIVE IS TO TOPPLE WHAT THEY REGARD AS "GODLESS" REGIME. HOWEVER, MINISTERS INDICATED
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RELUCTANCE CONFRONT ISLAMIC SOCIETIES HEAD ON UNTIL INTERNAL SITUATION IMPROVES. ONCE THIS HAPPENS THEY HAVE PROMISED DECISIVE ACTION. AS IN PAST, SAMUEL EXPRESSED BEWILDERMENT ON WHY ISLAMIC SOCIETIES--CLEARLY A DESTABILIZING FORCE--CONTINUE RECEIVE SAUDI FINANCIAL SUPPORT.

4. ON PERSONAL STATUS, SAMUEL SAID COPTS, CATHOLICS, AND PROTESTANTS HAVE FORMED JOINT COMMITTEE TO DRAFT LAW CONCERNING MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE WHICH WILL BE APPLICABLE TO ALL CHRISTIANS IN EGYPT. PRIME MINISTER HAS TOLD THEM, ONCE LAW DRAFTED, IT WILL RECEIVE GOVERNMENT'S BACKING IN PEOPLES ASSEMBLY. FORMER JUSTICE MINISTER ALSO VOICED SUPPORT FOR EFFORT SINCE, AT PRESENT, WHEN MEMBERS TWO CHRISTIAN SECTS ARE INVOLVED IN COURT ACTION ON FAMILY MATTER THEY ARE JUDGED UNDER MUSLIM LAW. SAMUEL NOTED THAT FORMER MINISTER AND HIS SEVEN DEPUTIES MET WITH COPTIC LEADERSHIP ON THIS MATTER FOR OVER ONE HOUR ON EASTER. INTER ALIA, SAMUEL SAID HE HAS ASKED PM TO APPOINT AT LEAST ONE CHRISTIAN JUDGE TO EACH FAMILY COURT TO HEAR CASES INVOLVING CHRISTIANS.

5. SAMUEL REPORTED APPEAL OF DECISION EXTENDING FOUR-WIFE PRINCIPLE TO CHRISTIANS STILL GOING FORWARD. DATE APPEAL WILL BE HEARD UNKNOWN BUT THREE PROMINENT COPTIC LAWYERS ARE PURSUING CASE FOR CHURCH. MATTER IS ONE OF BASIC PRINCIPLE AND COPTS INTEND SEE ORIGINAL DECISION REVERSED.

6. TURNING TO POLITICS (IN WHICH HE DEEPLY INVOLVED AS MEMBER MISR PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE), SAMUEL EXPRESSED GUARDED OPPOSITION TO SADAT'S REFERENDUM. HE TERMED IT A "RETREAT FROM DEMOCRACY." THIS, IN ITSELF, UNFORTUNATE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 CAIRO 13106

BUT SAMUEL FEARED IT COULD BE FIRST STEP TO FURTHER EROSION OF FREEDOM. HE THOUGHT IT WAS A MISTAKE WHICH WOULD GIVE PRESIDENT'S CRITICS MORE AMMUNITION WITH WHICH TO ATTACK HIM. SAMUEL "HOPED" ONCE REFERENDUM OVER SADAT WOULD CONTINUE MARCH TOWARDS LIBERALIZATION. HE DID NOT APPEAR HOPEFUL.

7. SAMUEL OPINED THAT MAJOR FACTOR WHICH ALLOWED LEFTISTS TO ATTACK SADAT, LEADING TO CRACKDOWN, WAS STALLED PEACE PROCESS. THIS HAS FOCUSED ATTENTION ON INTERNAL SITUATION. SO LONG AS PEACE PROCESS APPEARED FAVORABLE NO ONE LOOKED AT PYRAMIDS PLATEAU OR OSMAN AHMED OSMAN'S ACTIVITIES. SHOULD PEACE PROSPECTS IMPROVE, SAMUEL SUGGESTED, CURRENT DIFFICULTIES WILL BE FORGOTTEN QUICKLY. HE APPLAUDED SENATE APPROVAL OF AIRCRAFT PACKAGE BUT SAID THIS IS NOT ENOUGH. SAMUEL APPEALED FOR USG TO DO

EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO OBTAIN SOME MOVEMENT TOWARDS
SETTLEMENT. OTHERWISE, HE SAID, SADAT COULD GO AND
"ANYTHING WHICH FOLLOWS HIM WOULD BE HORRIBLE FOR US."
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